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In The Nation

The Democratic Dividing Line on the U-2

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WASHINGTON, May 30—Public statement made yesterday by the Senate majority leader and the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations give higher visibility to the line of demarcation among national leaders of the Democratic party in dealing with the political issue raised by the U-2 episode. All are agreed there should be a public analysis of the judgment, competence and coordination of the Executive department in this operation, with the objective of preventing the repetition of such errors as may be disclosed. Their division is over the method and tone of this analysis.

It is now perfectly clear that Senators Johnson and Fulbright disapprove the outright nature of the attacks on the Administration that have been made by Adlai E. Stevenson and Senator Symington, two of Johnson's three principal rivals for the Democratic Presidential nomination. The bases of their disapproval are equally clear: (1) That this type of attack serves to promote Premier Khrushchev's objective of reducing the world prestige of the United States by assailing the character and dedication to duty of its President. (2) That the tone of these attacks may damage the party's 1960 election chances by creating the public conviction that the Democrats are making a partisan issue of the U-2 episode.

Fulbright's Statement

In his interview yesterday on N. B. C.'s "Meet the Press" television program Senator Fulbright was careful to maintain the nonpartisan and nonpolitical attitude which especially characterizes a royal commission inquiry in Britain. He questioned aspects of the U-2 case, and this in itself was criticism. But he deplored the prospect of partisan exploitation of the episode.

The Foreign Relations chairman emphasized once more that, so far as he can lay down the line for his committee, its inquiry will be a "study" for the end purpose of tightening an otherwise sound Government structure against the large cracks in it which the handling of the U-2 matter disclosed; a job of reconstruction to eliminate the weak points, not demolition job.

Senator Johnson's conception of responsibility of national political leaders was expressed by what he said yesterday in the Dakotas. He objected to any speech or attitude which had the purpose or the effect of furthering Premier Khrushchev's objective to "divide the country and destroy the prestige of the President. I am not going to do his job for him," said the Senate majority leader.

Shape of Legitimate Issue

Obviously if Johnson did not think some other politicians, including Presidential candidates, were doing this unwittingly, he would not have entered his caveat. The same apprehension was apparent in Fulbright's. And these positions indisputably are in the best interests of the United States.

There is a legitimate political issue inherent in the Administration's record on the U-2. And since the major parties are to go to the people this year with two candidates of whom one will be the next President, there is a legitimate partisan issue in it as well. But on the method and tone of its presentation to the country will depend the constructive value. And thus far there is a distinct difference among the choices made by the Presidential aspirants. The approach of Johnson's rivals may be briefly summarized as follows:

Positions Summarized

Vice President Nixon—an all-out defense of the shifting Administration record as successively revealed. Stevenson—a charge that the Administration was culpable for handing Khrushchev "the crowbar and the sledgehammer" with which he could "wreck the summit conference" and "humiliate" the United States. Symington—an indictment that a "complacent President" permitted the steady deterioration of national purpose and military power that made it possible for the country to be subjected to "humiliating disaster in Paris." Kefauver—a judgment that the President might have saved the conference by "honorably regretting" the U-2 incident to Khrushchev in Paris. Governor Rockefeller—a call for a "national discussion" of why the summit conference failed, in which Republicans should not "try to divide the present situation" and the Democrats should not "use a shallow partisan effort to sign all error to its adversaries and wisdom to themselves."